

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8451
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 3537

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PEPR, SY, LE
SUBJ: SYRIAN SUPPORT FOR FRANGIEH

1. SUMMARY: SENIOR SYRIAN INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS ARE
TROUBLED BY THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE FRANGIEH MURDER AND
BELIEVE PIERRE GEMAYEL HAD TO KNOW IN ADVANCE ABOUT THE
ATTACK ON IHDIN. THEY BELIEVE THE FRANGIEH MURDER IS TIED
TO A PLOT TO MAINTAIN ISRAELI HEGEMONY IN THE SOUTHERN PART
OF LEBANON AND PUNISH THE FRANGIEHS FOR THEIR SUPPORT
OF SYRIAN POLICY. DESPITE THEIR ANGER, THE SYRIANS WILL
ATTEMPT TO AVOID DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN THE FRANGIEH-KATAEB
FRAY BUT CAN BE EXPECTED TO TILT TOWARD FRANGIEH WHENEVER
POSSIBLE SINCE THEY CANNOT AFFORD FOR THEIR LEBANESE POLITICAL
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SUPPORTERS IN THE NORTH TO LOSE INFLUENCE TO THE GEMAYELS.
A WELL-INFORMED LOCAL PRELATE TELLS US THAT HE EXPECTS
SULEIMAN FRANGIEH TO FIND WIDESPREAD SUPPORT AMONG NORTHERNERS
BEYOND HIS IMMEDIATE MARONITE FOLLOWING. HE SCOFFS AT
RUMORS THAT THE SYRIANS HAD ANY ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE OF THE
PLOT TO KILL THE YOUNGER FRANGIEH GIVEN THE ASSADS' CLOSE
PERSONAL AND POLITICAL TIES WITH THE FAMILY. BIG QUESTION

MARK IS HOW THE INTRA-MARONITE BLOODLETTING WILL AFFECT SYRIA'S HERETOFORE TROUBLED RELATIONS WITH CAMILLE CHAMOUN.
END SUMMARY.

2. DAMSSCUS-BASED CHRISTIAN BISHOP, AFTER A RECENT MEETING WITH SENIOR SYRIAN INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS MUHAMMAD AL-KHULI AND MUHAMMAD NASSIF, SAYS THAT THESE MEN DISPLAYED UNCHARACTERISTIC EMOTION OVER THE IMPLICATION OF THE TONY FRANGIEH ASSASSINATION. HE FURTHER UNDERSTANDS THAT RIFAT AL-ASSAD WAS, AS THE RUMORS SUGGESTED, PERSONALLY UPSET THAT HIS FRIEND TONY AND HIS FAMILY HAD BEEN BRUTALLY ASSASSINATED. THE BISHOP, WHO IS OF LEBANESE ORIGIN AND IS OFTEN CONSIDERED BY THESE INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS ABOUT EVENTS THERE, SAID THAT THE SYRIANS BELIEVE THAT SHEIKH PIERRE GEMAYEL HAD TO KNOW IN ADVANCE ABOUT THE ATTACK ON IHDIN. WHILE THE SYRIANS MAY HAVE BEEN WARY OF PIERRE GEMAYEL, THEY HAD GENERALLY TAKEN THE POSITION THAT HE COULD BE DEALT WITH AND TRUSTED TO CARRY OUT WHAT HE AGREED TO. THIS MAY NO LONGER BE THE CASE.

3. THESE SYRIAN INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS BELIEVE THAT THE FRANGIEH KILLING WAS MORE THAN A TRADITIONAL VENDETTA BUT WAS MEANT TO PREOCCUPY THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AND SYRIA IN ORDER TO THWART THE DESPATCH OF THE LEBANESE ARMY TO THE SOUTH. THIS WOULD PERMIT THE ISRAELIS TO CONTINUE TO CONTROL A SECURITY STRIP THROUGH THEIR PROXIES, THE MARONITE
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MILITIAS. THEY ALSO BELIEVE, AS LOCAL PRESS REPORTS SUGGEST, THAT THE FRANGIEHS WERE BEING PUNISHED FOR THEIR WITHDRAWAL FROM THE LEBANESE FRONT, THEIR RECONCILIATION WITH RASHID KARAMI, THEIR DENUNCIATION OF ANY MOVE TOWARD PARTITION, BUT MOST OF ALL, FOR THEIR CLOSE TIES TO THE SYRIANS. THEY NOTE THAT SHEIKH PIERRE HAD PRIOR TO THE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL WARNED THAT FAILURE TO CONTROL EFFECTIVELY THE SOUTH OF THE COUNTRY WOULD INVITE THE RETURN OF THE ISRAELIS--A STATEMENT THE SYRIANS FOUND GALLING. MOREOVER, SYRIANS WERE ANGERED BY GEMAYEL'S COMMENTS ON THE FRANGIEH ASSASSINATION IN WHICH HE EQUATED IT WITH THE KILLING OF SEVERAL PHALANGISTS IN THE NORTH.

4. BASED ON HIS SOURCES, THE BISHOP PREDICTED THAT SYRIA WILL NOT MOUNT FURTHER MAJOR ATTACKS AGAINST FRANGIEH'S ENEMIES BEYOND THEIR INITIAL OPERATIONS AGAINST DEIR AL-AHMAR AND SEVERAL OTHER SITES FROM WHICH THE ATTACKERS OF IHDIN CAME. DESPITE THE ASSADS' ANGER, THE SYRIANS DO NOT WISH TO REIGNITE A MAJOR WAR IN LEBANON, ESPECIALLY SINCE THEY VIEW ALL OF THIS AS A MAJOR CONSPIRACY (WHATEVER ELSE?) YET, THE SYRIANS ARE LIKELY TO OPERATE BEHIND THE SCENES TO THWART THE KATAEB AND PRESERVE FRANGIEH'S TRADITIONAL

TURF. IT IS LIKELY, HE SAID, THAT IN ANY ENSUING BATTLES
ADF INTERVENTION WOULD TILT TOWARD THE NORTHERNERS. THE
SYRIANS ALSO CAN BE EXPECTED TO LOOK THE OTHER WAY IF
FRANGIEH'S PEOPLE SOUGHT SELECTIVE RETALIATION.

5. THE SYRIANS CANNOT AFFORD TO HAVE FRANGIEH AND OTHER
NORTHERN POLITICIANS WHO HAVE SHOWN CONSIDERABLE UNDERSTANDING
FOR SYRIA'S ROLE, INCLUDING NOT ONLY FRANGIEH BUT MEN LIKE
RASHID KARAMI AND TALAT MERHABI, FALL VICTIM TO THEIR
ENEMIES. BUT SYRIA WILL TREAD CAUTIOUSLY.

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6. THE BISHOP THEN GAVE HIS OWN ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION
WHICH HE PRESUMABLY HAS ALSO GIVEN SYRIAN INTELLIGENCE
AND WHICH EMBASSY BEIRUT CAN BEST EVALUATE. ACCORDING TO
HIM, VIRTUALLY ALL THE MAJOR NORTHERN POLITICIANS DEPEND ON
TRADITIONAL FOLLOWINGS RATHER THAN PARTIES. THEY RESENT
THE KATAEB WHICH MASQUERADES AS A MODERN PARTY BUT WHICH
THEY SEE AS NOTHING MORE THAN A VEHICLE FOR THE ENHANCE-
MENT OF THE GEMAYEL FAMILY. IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN KNOWN THAT
THE KATAEB WANTED TO DOMINATE LEBANON AND ALL OF THEM STAND
TO LOSE IF THE KATAEB SUCCEEDS IN EXPANDING ITS INFLUENCE

FURTHER NORTHWARD. THE FRANGIEHS COULD THEREFORE COUNT ON THE SUPPORT OF MOST OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX IN THE ADJACENT KOURA REGION INCLUDING THE PROMINENT AL-GHUSN FAMILY AND THE SYRIAN NATIONALIST PARTY, WHICH HAS BEEN REASSERTING
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ITSELF THERE WITH THE HELP OF THE SYRIANS. BISHOP ALSO BELIEVES THAT FATHER SHERBIL KASSIS OWES HIS PRIMARY ALLEGIANCE TO FARNGIEH. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES IT IS EVEN POSSIBLE THAT FRANGIEH WILL SEEK AND RECEIVE PALESTINIAN AID. TRADITIONAL MUSLIM RIVALS IN TRIPOLI AND THE AKKAR WOULD CLOSE RANKS WITH FRANGIEH TO KEEP OUT THE KATAEB.

7. THE BISHOP SAID THAT IF HE COULD BE PERMITTED TO REMOVE HIS CLERICAL HAT FOR A MOMENT AND SPEAK AS A LEBANESE, HE EXPECTS THE THE FRANGIEHS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS WILL NOT REST UNTIL SUITABLE REVENGE IS EXACTED. SINCE FURTHER ASSASSINATIONS OF LEADING PERSONALITIES IS INEVITABLE, IT IS BETTER FOR LEBANON IF IT HAPPENS QUICKLY AND IS NOT DRAWN OUT OVER A PERIOD OF YEARS, KEEPING LEBANON IN A CONSTANT STATE OF TURMOIL.

8. THE BISHOP SCOFFS AT RUMORS CIRCULATING THAT THE SYRIANS HAD ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE OF THE IHDIN ATTACK AND DID NOTHING TO PREVENT IT. HE RECOUNTED THE WELL-KNOWN FAMILY LINKS GOING BACK OVER TWENTY YEARS BETWEEN THE FRANGIEHS AND THE ASSADS. IT IS PREPOSTEROUS TO BELIEVE THAT HAFEZ AL-ASSAD WOULD HAVE PERMITTED IT TO OCCUR--HE IS NOT A DISHONORABLE MAN. IF THE SYRIAN WANTED TO ARRANGE ASSASSINATIONS TO SPLIT THE MARONITE COMMUNITY, THEY WOULD HAVE TARGETED THEIR ENEMIES AND NOT THE HEIR-APPARENT OF THE MOST PROMINENT MARONITE FAMILY COOPERATING WITH THEM. SYRIA'S OFFICIAL SHOCK AND ANGER IS GENUINE. (COMMENT: WE TOO FIND IT HARD TO CREDIT THE REPORT THAT SYRIANS ACQUIESCED IN THE YOUNG FRANGIEH'S MURDER.)

9. COMMENT: BISHOP'S ASSESSMENTS BASED ON HIS INTELLIGENCE CONTACTS AND PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT WITH THE AREA AGREE SUBSTANTIALLY WITH THE REMARKS OF DEPFONMIN QADDUR TO THE
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CHARGE ON JUNE 19. HOWEVER, BISHOP'S INFORMED SPECULATION THAT SYRIAN WILL BE OPERATION QUIETLY TO BOLSTER FRANGIEH IN HIS VENDETTA AGAINST THE GEMAYELS IS PROBABLY ON THE MARK. IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO OBSERVE HOW ALL OF THIS AFFECTS CHAMOUN'S HERETOFORE TROUBLED RELATIONS WITH THE

SYRIANS.
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